

Welcome to The Boomer Business Owner. My guest today is Marc Miller. Marc is a Baby Boomer whose career journey has included 22 years at IBM, several thriving tech startups, and a stint as a high school math teacher. His latest endeavor is Career Pivot, where he helps others, especially Baby Boomers, find careers that they can grow into for the decades that lie ahead.

Hey, Marc. Welcome to the show.

Thank you, Charlie. I've been looking forward to this.

Being a Baby Boomer, it's obviously hitting home, and hopefully for a lot of our listeners as well. Tell us a little bit more about Career Pivot, and what specifically you're doing there.

Sure. Career Pivot came out of the last two recessions. I worked for IBM, as you said, for 22 years and then in '99 they screwed me on my pension, and I walked away in January of 2000 to go work for a successful tech startup, a semiconductor. Then I nearly killed myself in 2002 on a bicycle. I hit a car head on at 15 miles an hour, and obviously, lived. Then I went off to teach high school math, I did some non-profit work. I joke that I relapsed, I went back into tech again.

The concept behind Career Pivot came out of about 2009 when here I am back at a tech startup, both of my startups were... I rode out both the dot com bust and the Great Recession in successful tech startups. My timing couldn't have been better, while I watched all my friends getting wiped out in these two recessions. I have more friends who either went bankrupt, lost their homes. I've been a professional career changer. I'm on my seventh career.

What I do is work with largely people, typically 40 and up, to figure out who they are. Most of us, when we reach a certain age

we've kind of forgotten who we are. We've remade ourselves in the image of our employers. I like to say we've morphed our behaviors. Then start working at: What's the next step? Very often it's rebranding, building a brand, a personal brand, and then figuring out: How do we promote that brand? I've had a couple of clients build online businesses, I've had many big... We came up with the term "pivot," because it's usually not this big leap. It is incremental steps to get to where you want. It varies with everyone. Everyone takes a slightly different path, but my goal is to play Sherpa for them.

Okay. When I think of career, I think of job. For some reason I tie those two together, but clearly from your comment just a few moments ago, it doesn't need to be a job, it can be an entrepreneurial endeavor, for example, an online business, correct?

Oh yes. My mantra is: I was raised to be an employee, to go work for a father-like company that would take care of me, and after 30 years I'd be able to retire. Well, they moved my cheese. Right? What it comes down to is, to put it bluntly: Sometimes when we get over 60, no one will hire us. So the choice is: Go start a business. One of the interesting phenomena we're seeing today is about two-thirds of all small businesses are owned by Baby Boomers.

Wow.

We're now seeing, with valuations finally going back up, a lot of these Boomers, eventually they're going to sell. By the way, they're going to sell, and not give it down to their kids because we didn't have enough kids to give our businesses to. I'm going to tell you probably a third of those are not going to retire, they're going to go start another business.

The other piece is we are the most entrepreneurial generation right now because I call it the "necessity entrepreneur." You're

60-65, you have \$100,000 in a 401k, it's not enough money to retire on, and no one will hire you, so go start a business. This is one reason why franchising is doing well, starting online businesses. It's never been easier to be an entrepreneur.

At the risk of sounding like I'm looking for some free coaching, help me think through this. I am Charlie, I am in my late 40s or my early 50s, I'm an accountant, and I've been doing this for 20 years. I perhaps, maybe, kind of sort of like what I'm doing, but maybe not. I'm just ready, for whatever reason, to pivot my career. I find you, I come to you. That's where I am. At a very high level, what are the first couple of things you're going to interact with me on to help me through this process?

I'm a Birkman Consultant. I use the Birkman assessment, which I call Myers-Briggs on steroids. I'm going to pick your personality apart. One of the things I love about the Birkman, I'll tell you how you behave, which is what all the personalities do, but then: How do you want to be treated in that same area? I'll use myself as an example. I am a closet introvert. I appear very extrovert. I am a phenomenally good public speaker. I am wonderful at networking events. I can work the room with the best. By the way, when I walk out of the room, I collapse, I'm exhausted. So I've changed my behavior such that I get paid more to be an extrovert, to put it bluntly, but it's not who I am. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to use the assessment to take us and get you to reflect back on when times really sucked, understand why, then go back to when things were really good and understand why.

One of my key pieces is I want to work with people to run to something and not run away from something. The phenomena we see, it's very similar to the woman who has an abusive husband. She divorces him, then she runs back into it and marries another one because it's familiar. We do that with our jobs. I joke I've left tech twice. I don't want to go back into

tech, I don't want to inhale complex technologies anymore, but I can, and I relapsed once because I know how to do it and I know how to make that money.

I'm going to pick you apart, but it's to get you to look back at your career, to reflect back and understand: What do I really want to do? I can't tell you the number of closet creatives I've worked with, people who have taken that creative side, shoved it, and gone off to be an accountant. I have one woman who she's super creative, and she went to work for a television network that she managed advertising and sponsors. Got paid a lot of money, but it made her miserable. It's to get: Who are you? You have forgotten it.

Got it. In reading your profile, I went to the website to check out the Birkman Method, and I, Charlie, can't go to the Birkman Method website and take that test. I need to take it through some sort of a consultant or certified trainer like yourself. Is that correct?

That's correct. You can get a snapshot. You can go buy the Birkman book. In fact, I give out the link from the book and it will give some basic reports. You take the full assessment in order to get the advanced reports, and unfortunately, Birkman you really need someone to help you interpret.

I recently took, for example, I think it was the DiSC profile. I feel like I've taken a lot of these tests before. Fine, I'm a D, an I, a C, I'm a low, whatever, and then they also give you this 35-page report. After taking the test, getting the results, reading the report, I'm still sitting here feeling like I'm at the same place I was before because I don't know what to do with it. What does that mean?

As I said, I have a whole system built on top of the Birkman to get you to use it. So things like it'll spit out a decision style and give me a write up, and I give that to my client and I say: "Go

find three problems you solved in your personal life and three problems you solved at work. How the heck did you do it?" Use the write up I give you as a poke to understand, because one of the things I want you to be able to say when you go do stuff, you talk to somebody, say: "This is how I solve problems. Let me give you some examples. Does that work for you?"

That is probably one of the biggest things of corporate fit. If you're going to go get a business partner, you need to understand how each of you think and each of you solve problems. By the way, once you understand how you do things, and a lot of it is self-observation, you now see how other people do stuff and particularly when it's very different from you.

I feel I'm speaking for other people when I say this in that what I would be looking for from a deliverable is fine. I engage you, Marc, and you say: "Take 27 tests here." Great. Now we have the results, you have the results. What I feel like I want is someone then to know about me, maybe listen to me talk for an hour about my life, and you could ask: "Charlie, tell me about your career. What are some fond memories you have? What are some non-fond memories you have?" and take that information, take the results of the test and say: "Charlie, your voice really picked up when you were in high school and you were playing guitar in the whatever club. It really appears that you have a good business mind. Have you ever thought about selling guitars?" Obviously I'm just making this up.

It's something I probably wouldn't put together on my own, but someone as an objective observer like you who has the skills, I know you can't tell me what to do and I don't want you to tell me what to do, but I feel like I want more guidance than I've gotten in the past from these things. Is that a deliverable from working with you?

Yeah. What I do is after we do the assessment, we'll do three feedback sessions. We will spend about five hours together. I'm going to give you homework between each session, and you're going to spend 5-10 hours overall doing my homework. You can go to my website, I have all kinds of deliverables that we build off of. The key piece here is exactly that, to get you to understand why you've done certain things in the past, and: Do you want to keep doing them?

I have one guy I've been working with on and off. He was a sales guy. Why was he a sales guy? Because at 25 someone told him to go be in sales, and he was nice and he was good at it. Margins have gone down, B2B sales has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. I kind of picked him apart. He got an associate's degree in aviation, and he later went back and got his pilot's license and got his bachelor's degree. He thought he was going to teach high school math.

Then in the process, he said as a kid, if it had wheels, wings, or keels, he loved it. It's like: "Oh." I'm in Austin. What he ended up doing was going to Houston, and ended up on board testing out the Houston METRO Red Line. Eventually rose to be an instructor down there. He was driving trains. He did that for two years, he wanted to come home to Austin. Again, remember he's a licensed pilot. He's starting a job as a drone pilot trainer. It was getting him to go back to his youth and say: "What used to be cool, and why the hell are you doing this?"

All right, so you've piqued my interest. I'm listening, you've piqued my interest, and I want to work with you. Tell me what that entails. Is it a 30-day process we work together, 60, 90 days? Is my investment to work with you a flat fee, is it a monthly fee to work with you? Just give me a little more details about that.

Sure. It's rather interesting. I don't look like any other career person you've ever met. I come out of the tech world consulting,

so I package things into packages. So the first thing I do is an evaluation, I give a price for that. That typically takes us about a month to get through. Then I build a customized package usually around branding and the job search. If you want to start, I've had several people want to start a business, that's usually when I hand them off. I have a set of people behind me, whether it's through the Small Business Development Center, whether it's through our franchiser.

Then if we're doing branding and a job search, I do a six-month package where I will stick with you. I do not charge by the hour. I use the same scheduling tool you use, so my clients have access to it. As you go through these transformations, as you probably know, Charlie, everyone's different, everyone goes at a different pace, and you kind of adjust as to what rate they can go at. Two, a lot of times where people go next is not the final resting ground. In other words, that's why we came up with the term "pivot." You do this as an incremental process. Very often it's getting someone out of something that is really miserable into very often something that's less miserable so they can incrementally build something they want to do.

I'll use an example. I have a guy right now, believe it or not, who works for one of the big box hardware stores. Our first goal is to get him out of there because they use just-in-time scheduling, which Walmart, Lowes, Home Depot, all of them use. You have a different schedule every week. So our first goal is to get him out of there, and eventually probably... I think where we're ending up with him is his starting a photography business, but it's an incremental process.

Let me reflect back to you what I heard, and please correct me if I'm wrong.

Sure.

I engage you. At a high level we're going through this discovery process let's call it. At the end of that we're going to come up with one of two options: Number one, I like the job concept, I like the working for someone else concept, maybe just not who I'm working for now or what I'm doing now. Or I want to go the entrepreneurial route.

If I choose the former, I continue to work with you through that process since that seems to be your forte. If we decide that I want to start an online business, I want to do something entrepreneurial, you have folks that you work with that you would put me in touch with to take over from there.

Yes. I'll use an example. I have a former client who has a really cool online business. It's online/offline. It's Blue Spot Pets. It's for helping dogs and horses in brain chemistry. It is food supplements for dogs and horses. Their motto is: "If your dog is mad, sad, or bad – we can help you." By the way, they don't do cats because the first thing they do is a urinalysis, and you can imagine trying to get a urinalysis out of a cat. It's been a very long process, but I turned them over, I've got connections, very good connections at our local Small Business Development Center. This is an offshoot of a business that is very well-established that does this for humans. It's taking them longer than he expected and they're morphing the business, but I turned them over to someone else because, to put it bluntly, my business is not doing research on whether there's a market for supplements for horses and dogs. We spent more money after the Great Recession than before on our dogs, on our pets, so I thought it was a great idea, but what the hell do I know?

Marc, you obviously work with people in a coaching capacity for the lack of a better term. Have you ever in the past or do you currently avail yourself of the services of a coach, a mentor, or a mastermind group to help you grow your business?

Oh yes. I'm in my fifth year. For about the first three and a half, four years I had a business coach, actually a coaching coach. I am now trying to take my business online. I have a very large following online, and now I'm looking for masterminds and other groups to get me to the next level. I'm a big believer in coaching and mentors. I've always had a lot of mentors, and I currently have multiple mentors based on the facets of my business. One of the things I learned a long time ago: I'm good at what I know how to do, and anything else I go find help, which is difficult because I'm a guy and I don't like asking for directions.

Marc, I like to be respectful of people's time, so let's wrap up with this question. You are a successful business owner. I'm your neighbor, I'm your friend, and I say: "Hey, Marc." I know I can engage you for your services, but just as a friend we're having this brief conversation. I'm working for someone else. I might like to start my own business. Maybe I have started to do something or I want to start my own business. I know at the end of the day you may introduce me to someone else, but what would be some high-level pieces of advice, a couple of tips you would give me, just basic tips as a successful business owner yourself to help me move in the right direction to help ensure my success going forward?

Sure. The number one thing is know thyself, and that's what I spend my valuation process to make sure you really understand who you are, what makes you tick. What things do you like to do? One of my challenges is I'm very horizontally skilled, I know how to do a lot of stuff, but that doesn't mean I should do it. I've done my own soul-searching of: "Know myself. What am I good at and what should I hand off?" I'm a big fan of Pat Flynn's recent book, *Will It Fly?* which a lot of it is going: "Okay, I have this business idea. Is it the right business idea for me? Can I sustain it, or will I get bored with it, or will I get frustrated with it?" That's where getting the outside perspective... As I said, the first number one thing is know thyself.

Okay. Is there a number two you'd like to share with us?

The second piece is go build your tribe. You will almost never do this alone. I joke the fact that all of my career transitions or career changes have been what I call a half-step career change, and that is I had one foot in the old world, one foot in the new world, and there was always a relationship that took me across. In other words, we never do stuff alone, so build that tribe.

The third is: Be very careful of assumptions. There are two kinds of assumptions. There are conscious assumptions and the unconscious assumptions. It's the unconscious ones that eat you. There's a negotiation book, *Start With No*, and my mind has gone blank on the author.

Ron Shapiro.

No.

No? Not Ron?

No. I'll think of it. Anyway, I suffer from CRS, can't remember stuff. The interesting one in there is you should go: "Well, if I do this, of course they're going to do this." You're going: "How do you know that?" I also call this MSU syndrome, make stuff up. Right? It's those unconscious assumptions: -"Well, if I do this, they're going to do that." -"How do you know that?" -"Well, I don't really know that." So it's working off facts, it's doing your homework.

It's similar with my client who started Blue Spot Pets. I thought it was a great idea, but what the hell do I know? Go do your research. By the way, is anyone else in this market? Because if there is someone else, it kind of validates that someone else thinks it's also a good idea. Go do some market research. Don't assume: "I will build it..." Having been in a tech world, I've seen many of times: "Oh, I'll build it, they'll buy it." Yeah right.

I just checked and Ron Shapiro's book is *The Power of Nice*. "Nice", "No" kind of confused me a little bit there.

Yep, anyway.

This has been a great value-add, Marc. What is the best way for our listeners to reach out, connect with you, and find out more about your services?

Sure. You can reach me at www.CareerPivot.com. If you go to www.CareerPivot.com/Boomers, either "Boomer" or "Boomers," you'll get preview chapters of my second edition of my book, *Repurpose Your Career*. I have it planned out to come out early next year. You can always reach me, there's a contact button on the page, or you can always email me at Marc, M-a-r-c, my momma knew how to spell, @CareerPivot.com (www.Marc@CareerPivot.com).

That's a very kind offer with respect to the book, and all of the great resources mentioned in today's episode, along with a full transcript of today's episode, will be available on the show notes page at www.TheBoomerBusinessOwner.com.

Marc, thanks so much, on behalf of all of our listeners; we really, really appreciate your help.

Hey, thank you for having me on.